

March 7, 2010

In just four weeks, during the celebration of the Easter Vigil, a number of people will be received into the fullness of the Catholic Church in parishes throughout our diocese. Some had never been baptized. Others were baptized in another church or were baptized Catholic but never received religious instruction. During Lent, the Church invites us to stand in solidarity with those who will receive the Easter Sacraments for the first time and support them with our prayers, sacrifices, affection, and example.

My thoughts and prayers also turn to those who were once fully practicing Catholics but no longer join us on a regular basis for Sunday Mass. Of these numbers, many began to absent themselves from Sunday Eucharist for small reasons of inconvenience. Subsequently, they developed a routine on Sundays and holy days which no longer included worship. Very often, they eventually pushed God to the edge of their lives and in too many instances out of their lives.

We all know such people who have lost a meaningful relationship with Jesus and with the faith community. Perhaps that is the case with some members of our families. I suggest we pray on a regular basis for those who have given up the practice of their faith and strive to set a good example for them.

Just as family meals are important occasions to celebrate and intensify the bonding between family members, so too is regular faithful participation in Sunday Mass essential for our growth in relationship with the Lord Jesus and with the community of disciples.

During our participation in Sunday Mass, the Lord speaks to us words of comfort and challenge. He reminds us to whom we belong and the kind of choices we must make if we will find true peace and happiness in this life and

everlasting happiness in the next. The Lord leads us to deeper conversion as He helps us transform our minds, hearts, and attitudes to be more like His own.

In Baptism, we became one priestly people. During Mass, we praise the Lord together. Together, we ask for His mercy and intercede for the needs of all. As we grow closer to the Lord, we draw closer to one another so that we form one Body, one Spirit in Christ.

During Mass, we offer ourselves and all of our joys, sorrows, disappointments, successes, hardships, and crosses in, with, and through Jesus to the glory of God, the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

The Father is pleased with the gift that we offer at Mass of our self and the activities of our life in union with Jesus, and He gives us the very Body and Blood of His Son as nourishment for the challenges of the day and week.

Finally, at the end of Mass we are sent to bring the Good News of Jesus to those whom we will meet. Strengthened by the Eucharist, we are to continue Jesus' work of bringing more peace and justice, more truth, unity, and love into our families, to our workplaces, and especially to the sick, lonely, hungry, poor, and disenfranchised in our neighborhoods and society.

I was blessed with a deep love of Sunday and daily Mass from the seventh grade when I became able to attend a Catholic school. The Mass has always been the high point of my day and the nourishment I need to meet my responsibilities. I encourage you during this blessed Lenten season to look for opportunities to participate in Mass as you are able during the week. In your Masses and prayers, please remember those who will be welcomed into the faith community at the Easter Vigil as well as those who have strayed from the practice of the faith.